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TRAVTALK

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- 'Human touch & tech must coexist'03
- Empowering women leaders in the UAE04
- Moscow taps ME with visa-free entry05
- What makes ME click for weddings?09
- Hotel efficiency driven by AI & tech10
- DOT Philippines consults with agents12



Global weddings rush to UAE

Destination weddings have become a key highlight in the Middle East's tourism sector with the UAE, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Ras Al Khaimah taking the lead. **TRAVTALK** speaks to the tourism boards and key stakeholders about the way forward in this important sector.

“Dubai leverages its unique public-private partnership model to foster a supportive environment for wedding planners and their clients, through tailored offerings, logistical support and a comprehensive network of skilled suppliers, in addition to its diverse attractions and world-class infrastructure to ensure bespoke, memorable wedding experiences. With our focus on simplifying the process for couples and planners, there is just one permit required via the streamlined ePermit system managed by DET (Department of Economy and Tourism). Whether for large-scale public or smaller private gatherings, event organisers look to Dubai as a city renowned for its hosting capabilities, with a diverse range held every year across business, leisure and celebrations. For weddings specifically, DET facilitates special requirements to further streamline the process, and we advise wedding planners to engage with us early to navigate specific regulations. Destination weddings are flourishing in Dubai, and are a key pillar of the city's thriving tourism industry.” *Contd. on page 9 ▶*



Laila Suhail
CEO, Strategic Alliances and Partnerships Sector, Dubai DET

Staycay trending in ME

Starting off the UAE, staycations have been gaining popularity among the domestic travellers in the Middle East year after year. **TRAVTALK** speaks to hoteliers for their feedback on the trend.

“Domestic is the biggest growing market for the United Arab Emirates, as today guests prefer to travel light for convenient escapes just a drive away. Direct bookings have surged, and we see guests extending their stays to 2-3 days seeking customised offerings, beach access, kids amenities and entertainment, exceptional leisure facilities, as well as diverse F&B offerings. Families and couples particularly favour this trend, making Mövenpick Resort Al Marjan Island and Mövenpick Hotel Jumeirah Beach top picks for their unmatched locations. Staycations over summer year on year have become an important time to offer personalised holidays for guests across the UAE region.”



Paul Stevens
COO, Premium, Midscale & Economy
Division for MEA & Türkiye, Accor

Contd. on page 19 ▶

AI stirs hospitality in ME

Use of AI and technology in the hospitality industry is increasing, changing the business model. **TRAVTALK** speaks to leading industry leaders to find out how AI is being applied in their businesses.

“Every industry faces disruption and potential improvement through Artificial Intelligence. At Red Sea Global, we are harnessing AI to elevate both the guest experience and our environmental conservation efforts. Our initiatives include deploying technologies that support a seamless customer service, as well as using machine learning to monitor our coral reefs to enable swift identification and response to events like coral bleaching. However, tourism is fundamentally a people-centric industry. Travel is about connecting with diverse cultures, and there will always be an aspect of hospitality that remains uniquely personal and immune to the reach of AI.”



Sultan Moraished
Group Head of Technology and
Corporate Excellence, Red Sea Global

Contd. on page 10 ▶





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'Human touch & tech must coexist'

Emerging from the challenges of the pandemic, dnata Travel Group has rapidly accelerated its growth, leveraging diversified source markets and innovative technologies. In an insightful discussion on 'Journeys in Technology', **John Bevan**, CEO, dnata Travel Group, shares his perspective on the evolving travel landscape, the role of AI, and the balance between technology and human interaction.

TT Bureau

John Bevan, Chief Executive Officer, dnata Travel Group, sharing his views on the hype around Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its potential to replace travel agents, says. "I don't think AI will remove the need for travel agents. It amuses me when people say AI can plan a three-day itinerary. Essentially, it scrapes the internet for existing information and presents it to customers. But a good salesperson on the phone or in your shop will do a much better job. The human element is irreplaceable."

Recalling a historical analogy, Bevan, adds, "When the internet appeared, a chairman at a conference told travel agents to invest in a carpet for their shop rather than the internet. Similarly, AI has its uses, but it will not re-



John Bevan
CEO
dnata Travel Group

place the value of human creativity and personal touch."

Practical uses of AI

Internally, dnata Travel Group is harnessing AI for practical applications, especially in handling increasing costs and complexities. "We have seen significant cost increases and offshoring becoming more expensive. Therefore, we have started using AI and robotics to improve back-

end processes. For instance, we have developed a vault using AI to read and process manual hotel contracts, achieving a 25-30 per cent time gain. We anticipate up to 70-80 per cent improvement as the system matures," he says.

Bevan highlights other AI applications, such as automating schedule changes for airlines, which improves efficiency and customer communication. "We had success in the UK where a robot handles schedule changes, alerting clients within minutes. This saves time and resources, ensuring timely customer notifications," he shares.

Further enhancing customer experience

On the front end, AI assists agents in providing better service. "If an agent is planning a trip to Singapore, AI can suggest local events and attractions based on real-time

data, enriching the customer experience. However, AI will not take over the conversation; it enhances it," he says.

Balancing technology and human interaction

Bevan stresses on the importance of adapting to customer preferences. "Whether it's WhatsApp, email, chat, or face-

Value of physical presence

Despite technological advancements, physical presence remains significant in certain regions. "In the Emirates, 50 per cent of our transactions are offline. Human interaction is crucial, especially in corporate travel. People prefer meeting in-person rather than over Zoom," he says, sharing his experience.

as seen when prominent figures showcase their trips on platforms like Instagram," he opines.

Future predictions

Looking ahead, Bevan envisions continued importance of human interaction in travel planning. "Complex trips, such as first-time visits to Asia or South America, will still require human expertise. The travel industry needs to move away from pigeonholing customers and adapt to their evolving needs. Seamless booking and management systems are essential for the future," he says.

In a nutshell, while AI and technology are transforming the travel industry, the irreplaceable value of human touch and expertise remains central. dnata Travel Group is poised to navigate this evolving landscape, balancing innovation with personalised service. ▶

I don't think AI will remove the need for travel agents. It amuses me when people say AI can plan a three-day itinerary

to-face, we aim to communicate through the customer's preferred channel. For example, we have successfully used WhatsApp for concierge services, providing immediate assistance upon a client's arrival in Dubai," he says.

Social media influence

Social media plays a pivotal role in dnata's marketing strategy. "Social media is hugely popular here, especially among the Emirati community. Influencers can significantly impact travel trends,

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Empowering women leaders in the UAE

Emirati Women's Day is celebrated every year on 28 August to support and empower women in the United Arab Emirates. It not only highlights the major progress the region has made in terms of gender equality but underlines the role of Emirati women in the growth of the UAE. **TRAVEL TALK** speaks to women leaders to know the significance of the event for them and how it has impacted their lives.



Taghrid Alsaeed
Executive Director, Corporate Communications & Marketing, Miral

“ Emirati Women's Day is a reflection of my growth and development, made possible due to our nation's invaluable support. This empowerment has not only shaped my career but also granted me opportunities to make a positive impact on our community. The UAE has always focused on equal opportunities to all. ”



Sarah Adel Luqman
Senior Marketing Director
Miral Destinations

“ Emirati Women's Day celebrates the achievements and strength of UAE women. It's a time to honour their resilience, contributions, and ongoing journey towards equality and empowerment. The day spotlights the dedication of female leaders in the UAE's travel and tourism sector. It inspires others. ”



Meerah Ketait
Head of Retail and Leisure UAE
dnata Travel

“ Emirati Women's Day marks a celebration of women's success in this nation, including the important role we play in the workforce, building society, and the great effort the UAE is leading to ensure we are given the right chances, and the exposure needed to foster growth and success. ”



Dr Nadia Bastaki
Chief People & Corporate Affairs
Officer, Etihad Airways

“ I am incredibly proud to see Emirati nationals represented and excelling across all areas of our business. Through our specialised development programmes, Emirati women leaders remain committed to giving flight to ambition by nurturing top local talent and creating the leaders of tomorrow. ”



Aisha Al Mansoori
Captain
Etihad Airways

“ As the first female Emirati Captain in a commercial airline, I am extremely proud to see United Arab Emirates national women thriving in all areas of our business, particularly the skies. At Etihad, we give flight to ambition, and I hope more Emirati women are inspired to join us. ”



Fatima Al Hammadi
Senior Manager
HR Business Partner, Etihad Airways

“ It's very special to recognise and champion the achievements of fellow Emirati women, not just on Emirati Women's Day, but every day. Just as Etihad's purpose is to give flight to ambition, we hope to nurture the ambitions of Emirati women looking to grow their careers in the travel and aviation industry. ”

Compiled by TT Bureau

UAE enroute to be top wedding destination

The increasing size and worth of destination wedding market has witnessed Destination Management Organisations (DMO) place increasing focus on this segment. According to 'Destination Wedding Global Market Report 2024' published by Research and Markets, the destination wedding market is projected to increase from US \$27.64 billion in 2023 to US \$36.49 billion in 2024.

Research by the IMARC Group also indicated that by 2028 the global destination wedding market size will reach US\$ 125 billion. Based on such projections, it is no surprise that destinations worldwide have implemented creative strategies to obtain a share of this market, in the hope that prospective couples say 'I do' to their country. For example, last year, both the Ministry of Tourism in India and the Tourism Authority of Thailand launched campaigns to increase destination weddings. Through its 'Thailand Wedding Destiny' campaign, the Tourism Authority of Thailand implemented a creative strategy of selecting nine foreign couples from nine different countries for exclusive wedding ceremonies that will take place in its most romantic cities.

Weddings are not just joyous occasions but, for destinations, they are also critical economic drivers. Not only do weddings generate direct revenue through



the various expenses involved, but they also have a multiplier effect on the economy. This includes spending on local transportation, accommodation, attractions, and services associated with weddings, such as entertainment and photography. The wedding tourism market has experienced significant growth, fuelled by a rising demand for exclusive and intimate wedding experiences. Couples are increasingly opting for destinations that offer unique settings

and personalised services to create memorable celebrations. As the market evolves, destinations worldwide are innovating to meet these demands.

Given its market value and popularity as a tourist destination, it is not surprising that wedding tourism is flourishing in the UAE. As Visit Dubai exclaims on its website, 'Welcome to one of the best wedding destinations in the world'. With its stunning venues, world-class

hospitality services, and seamless event planning options, the UAE has emerged as one of the top choices for destination weddings. A recent report by WedMeGood, the Indian Wedding Planning Website and App, identified that the Middle East has surpassed Thailand

for instance, in an effort to position Abu Dhabi as a leading wedding destination, the Abu Dhabi Convention and Exhibition Bureau has unveiled a programme to provide visa assistance specifically for Indian nationals hosting weddings throughout the emirate.

cultures, the UAE provides the flexibility to cater to diverse preferences. Building on its existing core competencies and its ability to offer unique experiences, the future of wedding tourism will only get stronger. With proactive initiatives, the country provides prospective couples with the confidence and assurance that saying 'I do' will not only be a memorable experience but one where they also fall in love with the UAE.

Not only do weddings generate direct revenue through the various expenses involved, but they also have a multiplier effect on the economy

as the favourite Indian wedding international destination. This is extremely significant considering that India is one of the biggest growing source markets for those seeking destination weddings. The UAE's commitment to providing exceptional experiences makes it an ideal destination for couples seeking unforgettable wedding cel-

The UAE is home to more than 200 nationalities, forming a diverse mix of traditions and customs. This multicultural setting allows couples to include various cultural elements in their wedding ceremonies, making them distinctive and personalised. Whether it's a traditional Indian wedding, a Western-style ceremony, or a fusion of different



Dr Sean Lochrie
Associate Professor at Heriot-Watt
University Dubai
(The views expressed
are solely of the author.)

Moscow taps ME with visa-free entry

Moscow Government has been implementing various programmes over the past few years to attract the Middle East travellers. Among various initiatives, the government has been allowing visa-free entry for citizens from the UAE, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia, which has resulted in a steady growth of tourists from the region, says **Bulat Nurmukhanov**, Deputy Chairman, Moscow City Tourism Committee.

 Dr Shehara Rizly

What initiatives and strategies the Moscow Government is implementing to attract tourists from the Middle East?

There are a variety of travel products and offers, including tours of Arab countries, catered to understanding their needs and preferences to ensure a comfortable working environment. Organisation of business missions for Moscow travel companies, in order to establish contacts with foreign partners, familiarising local businesses with Islamic customs, such as Halal standards, are some of the key areas being worked on by the Moscow Government. Also, simplification of arrivals through visa-free entry for UAE citizens, and for citizens of Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia with an e-visa, which can be obtained within four days.



Bulat Nurmukhanov
Deputy Chairman
Moscow City Tourism Committee

How important is the Middle East market?

The Middle East is one of the priority areas, and the Moscow Government is making great efforts to promote the capital's tourism potential there. The Moscow City Tourism Committee team visited many Arab countries over the course of a year and a half. And what is pleasant to note is that, as a result of the visits, we see both the

first contracts and tourists, who come to Moscow for the first time after a long break. We also see a friendly attitude towards our delegates and our Moscow business from the tourism community of the Middle East. I am sure we have a great future together ahead of us.

Do you have any numbers in terms of tourists from the Middle East?

In 2022, tourists from the Middle East made 139,600 trips to Moscow. Last year, in 2023, the capital received 2.3 million tourists from other countries, with the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar breaking the record of previous years. For example, at the end of 2023, the flow of tourists from the UAE increased eight times; in the first quarter of this year, growth was also recorded compared to the previous one. The flow of tourists from the Middle East to Moscow has recovered

by more than 50 per cent after the pandemic. Moscow intends to double the number of annual visitors from the UAE this year. I am sure that when the UAE citizens see how hospitable and friendly Moscow is, how multi-

However, currently, 55 countries worldwide have been granted access to electronic visas on a federal level. In addition to Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Oman, citizens of India, China, Singapore, Japan, and many

friendly destination. With a large urban forest covering 50 per cent of its territory, the city prioritises nature restoration, leading to a decrease in CO2 emissions and pollutants. Tourists can enjoy various eco-friendly transportation options.

The Middle East is one of the priority areas, and the Moscow Government is making great efforts to promote the capital's tourism potential there

faceted it is and how open it is to accepting friendly cultures, they will decide to visit our capital.

Have you made any amendments to visa policies? (As UAE has 80 per cent expats who are Asian and need visa). As stated previously, citizens of many Middle Eastern countries enjoy a simplified visa regime.

other nations are also eligible to receive e-visas.

Could you share how the Moscow City Tourism Committee is working to promote sustainable tourism in Moscow?

Moscow is actively implementing sustainable development practices, making it a greener and more environmentally

Can you share any upcoming major events or attractions that the city of Moscow is planning to introduce to attract tourists from the Middle East?

Summer is the festive time in Moscow. Over 600 city venues come together to host the largest festival, "Summer in Moscow", beloved "Moscow Seasons" festivals, including the vibrant "Flower Jam" for garden enthusiasts, the historical "Times and Epochs" open-air museum, and many others. Moscow festivals offer residents and visitors a plethora of activities: concerts, lectures, workshops, and outdoor sports. ▶



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Save more with new AI tool

Travelport announces the launch of AI-powered Content Curation Layer (CCL), a new product within the Travelport+ platform that provides travel agencies more control over multi-source content.

TT Bureau



The Content Curation Layer (CCL) uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) to power search while trawling billions of trip options, helping agencies find the perfect match for their customers. The latest enhancement to the Travelport+ platform helps in quickly delivering the right range of accurate, highly intuitive search results to its travel agency partners worldwide.

at speed, via a singular search screen. Used for all content sources (LCC, EDIFACT, NDC, hotel, car, etc.), the CCL allows agents to compare apples to oranges in an apples-to-apples way," Webb added.

The latest tool helps in quickly delivering the right range of accurate, highly intuitive search results to its travel agency partners worldwide

"Travelport's role in the increasingly complex travel industry is to take millions of pieces of disparate information and make it simple for both travel agencies and providers to understand, search, sell and service," said **Greg Webb**, Chief Executive Officer at Travelport. "We believe AI and ML are powerful tools to do just that. The CCL will allow travel agencies to provide travellers the right range of normalised, enriched, bookable content

Travelport's CCL is a powerful tech-enabler that uses AI and ML to sift through aggregated, multi-source content and returns farter

search results than the average airline search response time.

One of the key features of the CCL is the Content Optimiser, a new Travelport+ product that offers agency customers greater control over all content types, including both traditional and NDC content. With the ability to apply agency-specific rules, agencies can use Content Optimiser to tailor search options and results, enhance revenue optimisation and mitigate content choice overload. "Our travel agency partners know their travellers well, and Content Optimiser gives agencies the ability to set their own rules and customise the type of results that are prioritised," Webb said. "This innovative product offers agencies more control of their content, with the support of AI to save agencies more time and money," he added.

Saudia takes the crown for flying on-time

Middle East airlines have been at the forefront in terms of on-time performance with the latest report shared by Cirium. Saudia ranks in the first position in the latest on-time performance data for airlines.

The On-Time Performance Report						June 2024
On-Time						(Global)
	On-Time Ranking	On-Time Arrival	Tracked Flights	CompFactor	TotalFlights	Summary of Top Performance
(SV)Saudia	1	88.22%	95.90%	99.85%	16,133	TotalOn-TimeArrivals 83.26%
(AM)Aeromexico	2	86.18%	99.93%	99.34%	16,844	
(LA)LATAM Airlines	3	85.83%	98.70%	95.81%	45,101	TotalTrackedFlights 99.19%
(JL)JAL	4	85.10%	100.00%	99.44%	25,731	
(AD)Azul	5	84.83%	99.25%	98.17%	25,902	TotalFlights 357,375
(NH)ANA	6	83.71%	99.99%	99.43%	24,376	
(QR)Qatar Airways	7	81.01%	98.83%	99.96%	16,772	(Middle East & Africa)
(DL)Delta Air Lines	8	80.05%	99.98%	99.20%	148,781	
(AV)Avianca	9	79.97%	99.69%	97.70%	21,895	TotalTrackedFlights 95.70%
(IB)Iberia	10	77.69%	99.65%	99.31%	15,840	
(FA)Safair	1	95.36%	98.86%	99.75%	4,768	TotalFlights 75,253
(WY)Oman Air	2	93.35%	99.03%	99.53%	3,005	
(KU)Kuwait Airways	3	91.13%	97.88%	99.56%	2,698	(Global)
(4Z)Airlink	4	88.84%	91.59%	99.94%	7,084	
(SV)Saudia	5	88.22%	95.90%	99.85%	16,133	TotalTrackedFlights 95.70%
(RJ)Royal Jordanian	6	86.11%	99.62%	99.91%	3,167	
(GF)Gulf Air	7	83.33%	81.86%	99.19%	4,685	TotalFlights 75,253
(QR)Qatar Airways	8	81.01%	98.83%	99.96%	16,772	
(EY)Etihad Airways	9	79.38%	99.75%	99.93%	7,066	(Global)
(FZ)Flydubai	10	77.68%	93.69%	99.74%	9,875	

King Khaled airport tops on-time flights

King Khaled International Airport and Abu Dhabi International Airport serving 104 routes and 122 routes have made it to the top rank in the global airports on time performance report by Cirium. With a total number of 20,596 flights from Saudia marking 85.6% in terms of on time performance, the region's second airport to be featured in the top-10 rung is Abu Dhabi International Airport.

Global	(Month) 2024-06-01 - 2024-06-30						Summary of Global Airports
	On-Time Ranking	On-Time Departure	Tracked Flights	Total Flights	Avg Dep Delay	Routes Served	
(RUH) King Khalid International Airport	1	85.60%	82.30%	20,596	50	104	Total On-Time Departures 76.07%
(GRU) Sao Paulo-Guarulhos International Airport	2	85.13%	96.79%	21,318	43	99	
(LIM) Jorge Chavez International Airport	3	83.95%	89.38%	14,297	70	63	Total Tracked Flights 95.63%
(HND) Haneda Airport	4	83.63%	98.27%	38,672	32	99	
(MEX) Benito Juarez International Airport	5	82.64%	95.58%	25,396	54	96	Total Flights 487,782
(AUH) Abu Dhabi International Airport	6	80.73%	98.14%	12,630	49	122	
(SCL) Arturo Merino Benitez Airport	7	80.46%	99.20%	11,473	50	57	Total Seats 87.83M
(IAD) Washington Dulles International Airport	8	80.43%	95.49%	20,278	73	135	
(SLC) Salt Lake City International Airport	9	79.89%	99.97%	20,112	69	96	Total Routes 2,218
(NRT) Narita International Airport	10	79.30%	91.12%	16,758	45	108	
(BOG) El Dorado International Airport	11	79.12%	91.06%	27,706	56	98	(Global)
(ATL) Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport	12	78.58%	99.72%	66,200	58	230	
(OSL) Oslo Airport Gardermoen	13	78.17%	98.77%	18,485	37	140	(Global)
(SYD) Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport	14	78.00%	98.30%	23,663	44	95	
(YVR) Vancouver International Airport	15	77.64%	93.48%	20,375	53	109	(Global)
(DTW) Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport	16	77.63%	99.86%	25,225	76	112	
(LAX) Los Angeles International Airport	17	77.57%	98.07%	44,534	64	182	(Global)
(BNE) Brisbane Airport	18	77.54%	95.51%	15,059	42	73	
(BKK) Suvarnabhumi Airport	19	77.49%	93.67%	26,239	44	128	(Global)
(MEL) Melbourne Tullamarine Airport	20	77.36%	97.91%	18,766	42	72	

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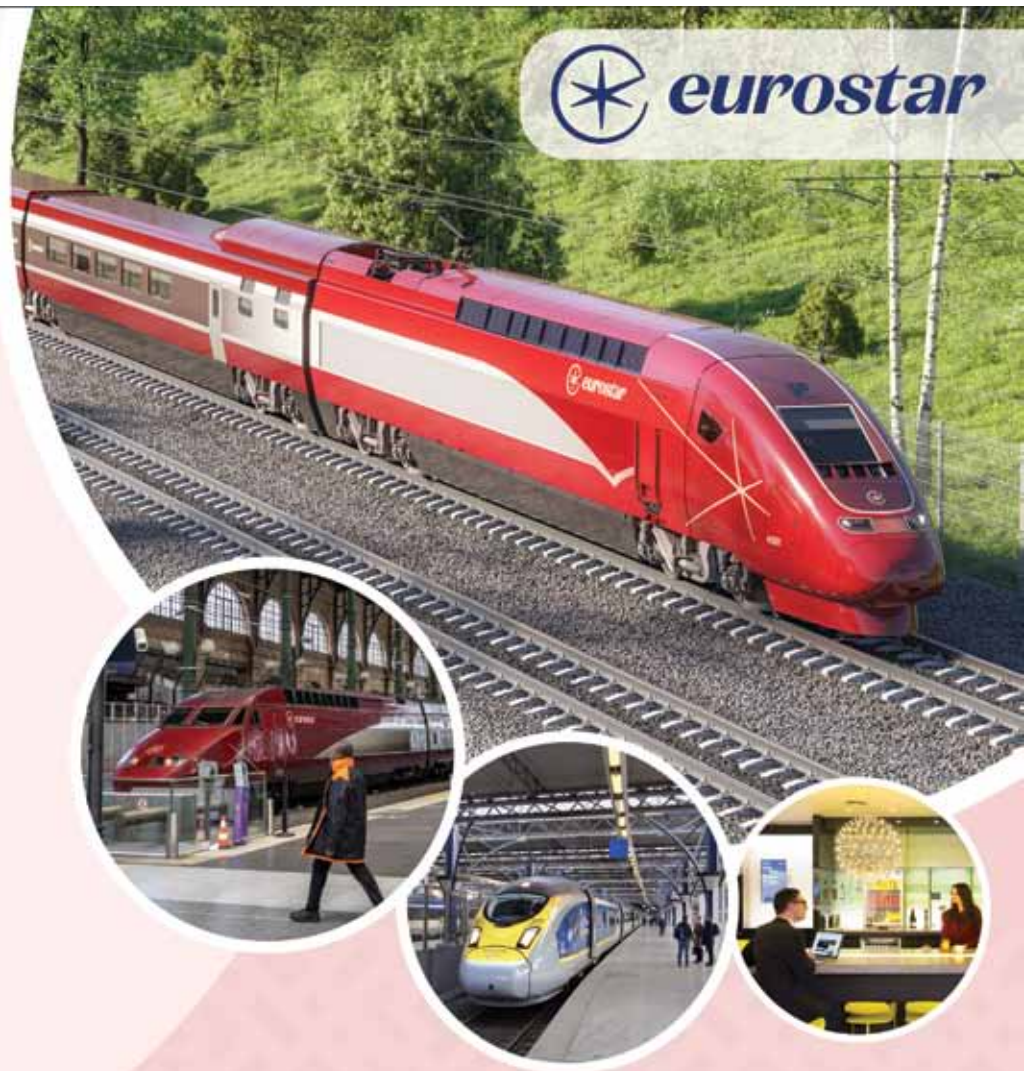
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New hospitality academy in Abu Dhabi

The Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) and Les Roches Global Hospitality revealed that the Abu Dhabi Hospitality Academy - Les Roches is set to be launched in Zayed Sports City in September 2024. The new educational institution will be housed in a historic building which seamlessly blends tradition with modernity, setting the stage for an inspiring learning journey.

 TT Bureau

A popular destination for athletic events, Zayed Sports City has recently emerged as a hub for a growing number of lifestyle, entertainment, and community experiences. The arrival of Abu Dhabi Hospitality Academy - Les Roches in the district will add to the area's cultural development.

Les Roches Global Hospitality's inaugural campus in the region builds on its legacy since its establishment in Switzerland in 1954, ranking fifth globally in hospitality and leisure management (QS World University Rankings by Subject, 2024). The academy aims to attract UAE nationals, as well as global talent to the industry, situated strategically in the heart of Abu Dhabi.

The hospitality industry in the emirate is witnessing exponential growth, solidifying Abu



Dhabi's position as one of the world's premier tourism destinations. In 2023, Abu Dhabi's tourism sector saw a remarkable surge, welcoming nearly 24 million visitors. The 27 per cent rise in hotel guests and 54 per cent increase in international guests bolstered the economy with an approximate AED49 billion contribution to the UAE's GDP.

His Excellency Saood Abdulaziz Al Hosani, Undersecretary, DCT Abu Dhabi, said: "The enhancement of Abu Dhabi's hospitality landscape is a key pillar of our roadmap for future growth. With our Tourism Strategy 2030 having set ambitious targets for increasing visits to the emirate, we aim to further elevate Abu Dhabi's world-renowned hospitality offering

and ensure its wide appeal to travellers from around the globe. Building the sector and talent in hospitality is crucial to these ambitions; the innovative curriculum of Abu Dhabi Hospitality Academy - Les Roches will guarantee the industry access to a steady stream of homegrown talent and a wealth of expertise, enabling a sustainable hospitality ecosystem."

Carlos Díez de la Lastra, CEO, Les Roches Global Hospitality, said: "We are thrilled of this new step forward for this ambitious project that will bring our legacy of excellence in hospitality education to the heart of the UAE. Our mission is to prepare students to thrive in a hospitality sector that is future-proof, authentic, and uniquely Emirati."


The institution will initially offer a bachelor's degree and will introduce two master's degrees

for students. Undergraduate students will be introduced to Emirati hospitality in their first semester through courses such as Hospitality Discovery Experience in the Emirates, Emirati Hospitality Culture, and Emirati Cuisine and Pastry.

Georgette Davey, the newly appointed Managing Director of Abu Dhabi Hospitality Academy - Les Roches, commented: "Abu Dhabi Hospitality Academy - Les Roches will be training and

The hospitality industry in the emirate is witnessing exponential growth, solidifying Abu Dhabi's position as one of the world's premier tourism destinations

in 2025. These programmes will combine traditional hospitality education with specialised Emirati-centric courses to deliver tailored training to stu-

preparing the next generation of industry leaders that uphold the values and authenticity of Emirati hospitality. We are honoured to be part of this unique journey." 

Marriott's Business Access to ease travel

In order to ease travel management process for small to medium-sized businesses, Marriott International launches 'Business Access by Marriott Bonvoy'. The programme combines the benefits of the Marriott Bonvoy portfolio with a suite of travel tools to seamlessly book, manage, and expense business travel, says **Drew Pinto**, the Executive Vice President and Chief Revenue and Technology Officer.

 TT Bureau

Marriott International has announced the launch of Business Access by Marriott Bonvoy™, a comprehensive online travel booking programme designed as a direct channel for small to medium-sized businesses. The programme combines an expanded booking experience with benefits and rewards available only through Marriott Bonvoy's award-winning travel programme and portfolio of brands. Business Access by Marriott Bonvoy is available to small to medium-sized businesses based in the United States, Canada, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America and is anticipated to expand to other regions.

According to a global survey commissioned by Marriott Bonvoy® and conducted by Wake-



field Research among business travellers at small to medium-sized businesses in the US, UK, Canada, and Mexico, 75 per cent report experiencing frustrations with their travel booking platforms. About 56 per cent say they are difficult to use, 27 per cent are unhappy with the inability to book travel and hotels from the same place, and more than a quarter (27 per cent) express disappointment with the

platforms' lack of integration with their travel expense programmes. In fact, 58 per cent are so unwilling to work within their current programmes that they would rather ask for forgiveness than permission for booking outside their companies' travel management platforms.

With Business Access by Marriott Bonvoy companies have the ability to book hotels in the Mar-

riott Bonvoy portfolio at a discounted rate, as well as flights, rail, and rental cars, within one easy-to-use multilingual tool. The programme includes additional features that satisfy business needs, such as access to live traveller data, real-time reporting, and expense management. "We recognise the significant value small businesses provide to the hotel industry, which is why we are excited to combine the ben-

efits of our award-winning travel programme with a comprehensive suite of tools in Business Access by Marriott Bonvoy," said **Drew Pinto**, Executive Vice President and Chief Revenue and Technology Officer, Marriott International. "Whether small to medium-sized businesses are looking for convenient online

Companies can take their travel to the next level and benefit from the features, such as discounted Marriott Bonvoy rates and awards, elevated shopping experience, customisable travel policies, global travel policy management and reporting, traveller health and safety monitoring, and expense management solutions.

Business Access by Marriott Bonvoy is available to small to medium-sized businesses in many countries, including the Middle East

booking capabilities for their employees or better expense management solutions, the all-in-one platform, merged with our portfolio of hotel brands around the world, provides everything they need to manage their business travel needs," Pinto added.

Employees of small and medium-sized businesses who join Business Access by Marriott Bonvoy will have full access to the offerings of Marriott Bonvoy, Marriott International's award-winning travel programme and marketplace. 

What makes ME click for weddings?

► Contd. from page 1



Mohamad Saade
General Manager, Radisson Hotel
& Residence Riyadh Olaya, KSA

“As a new hotel, we have experienced a strong demand and our pacing looks positive. Guests often seek elegant spaces, exceptional catering, and personalised service. Our guest demographic primarily comprises individuals from the Middle East, we often receive wedding inquiries from Saudi Arabia. As a new hotel, we are excited to announce that we are anticipating 10 to 12 weddings per month, with a potential increase to 18 during peak seasons.”

“Weddings are popular at Nofa Riyadh, A Radisson Collection Resort, with clients seeking a picturesque venue, exceptional service, and memorable experiences. We receive inquiries from various



Petr Dubsky
GM, The Diplomat Radisson Blu Hotel, Residence and Spa, Bahrain

“The main thing wedding customers look for is the location, service, decor, variety of food and ease of accessibility. They also appreciate a wedding coordinator who understands their vision for their dream day and is



Mahmoud Saffarini
Director of Sales & Marketing,
Movenpick Resort Al Marjan Island

“We have catered to Arabic, Filipino and Indian clients in terms of conducting wedding receptions at our property. Guests request us for menus, and we tailor-make them according to their requests. When



Anna-Marie Dowling
General Manager, Nofa Riyadh, A
Radisson Collection Resort

“Weddings are highly sought after at The Diplomat Radisson Blu Hotel, Residence and Spa. Our property boasts one of the largest venues in Bahrain, exceptional culinary offerings, and a wide range of cuisine options. We receive inquiries from India, as Bahrain Tourism has promoted Kingdom of Bahrain as a wedding destination in India. The percentage of weddings undertaken by our hotel is 60. Bookings for weddings come through many channels.”



David Allan
Cluster General Manager
Radisson Hotel Group, UAE

flexible to deliver all they want. Weddings in our hotels account for 25 to 30 per cent of our events business, most of the bookings come directly by email, or through the website or third-party online partners we work with.”

“Since the pre-opening, weddings have been incredibly popular. Our first lead closed was a high-end destination wedding with an almost full buyout, valued at over AED 1 million. Customers seek a mix of traditional ballrooms and unique outdoor venues. Many desire exclusive, resort-like touches. We have successfully hosted over 60 weddings in two years. Bookings come directly or through word of mouth about our excellent service.”



Philistine Kharbouch
General Manager
Jannah Burj Al Sarab Hotel

it comes to the decorations, guests select and advise on the way they need them to be placed and we offer according to their requirements. We have conducted a few weddings so far. Generally, bookings have been initiated directly.”



Kunal Salooja
Director of MICE, Grand Hyatt Abu Dhabi Hotel & Residences Emirates Pearl

“The wedding segment is just as important as other segments, especially because it primarily yields revenue on weekends, which gives the hotel additional positioning and revenue opportunities. Based on current trends and data from the past 12 months, weddings are typically booked 75-120 days in advance. This is a shorter booking window compared to previous years, which was approximately 120-180 days ahead of the wedding day.”

“Weddings are popular at our property. Customers look for picturesque venues, exceptional service, and bespoke packages. We receive inquiries mainly from the UK, India, and GCC countries. We have



Sapna Aidasani
Director Marketing
Pluto Travels

“We are hosting more than 200 weddings per year and there are multiple factors driving the business. Firstly, the ‘word of mouth’ publicity. Secondly, the variety of wedding venues in open air and one



Alfio Bernardini
General Manager, Grand Plaza
Movenpick Media City Dubai

“Weddings are increasingly popular at Grand Plaza Movenpick Media City Dubai. Guests look for decor, flexibility, food menu, and ambiance. We receive inquiries from various countries. The wedding segment at the hotel is growing year on year. Most bookings are made directly by clients, while some are supported through agents. The hotel undertakes visa processes and supports every request by noting details and assisting at every step.”

“Weddings at the Park Regis Kris Kin Hotel have been popular among our main clientele, comprising Indian and Filipino nationals, for more than 10 years. About 28 per cent of our revenue from MICE is



Tareq Bin Hussain
Director of Sales
Shangri-la Dubai

undertaken 15 per cent of our total events as weddings. Bookings come through agents and directly from clients. We support requests by offering tailored packages, a dedicated wedding planners, and bespoke services.”

“We receive wedding inquiries majorly from European countries and the US, with requests for beach venue or a venue with panoramic view of Dubai and Desert venues. Clients book through us, so that they have multiple options that we can offer than going straight to the hotel or venue, as sometimes there are other logistics involved. Weddings or destination weddings call for many preparations and licensing as well. We offer guests end-to-end solutions.”



Dalia Amer
General Manager, Radisson Blu Hotel,
Alexandria, Egypt

of the most luxurious and spacious banquet halls in Egypt in addition to our strong social presence and engagement with the community, and last and most significant, our care and service to make every moment matter.”



Michael Chan
General Manager
Park Regis Kris Kin Hotel Dubai

derived from weddings. Bookings originate from direct inquiries or referrals. Our wedding packages are comprehensive, covering venue rental, F&B options, accommodations, and decorative elements.”

Compiled by Dr Shehara Rizly

Hotel efficiency driven by AI & tech

► Contd. from page 1



Sultan Otaibi
Chief Executive Officer
Taiba Investments

“At Millennium Hotels and Resorts MEA, we view AI as a game changer. It’s automating repetitive tasks like check-in and housekeeping scheduling, freeing our staff to become experienced architects.



Michael Grieve
Chief Brand Officer
Jumeirah

“While technology enhances efficiency, maintaining a human connection is essential to ensure meaningful experiences. At Accor, we integrate technology into hotel operations in ways that complement



Dalia Amer
General Manager
Radisson Blu Hotel, Alexandria, Egypt

“While AI and technology are transforming the hospitality industry, they will never replace the human touch and the entire human element. Technology enhances efficiency, but the warmth and

“AI’s impact on the hospitality industry is profound. With tangible reductions in cost seen across AI-powered hotel operations, more hoteliers are integrating the technology to dynamically adjust pricing, craft tailored marketing strategies, and streamline operations. From predictive maintenance to energy management and housekeeping, AI elevates operational standards across the board, setting the industry on a sustainable growth path.”



Fahad Abdulrahim Kazim
CEO, Millennium Hotels and
Resorts MEA

Imagine – a concierge who remembers your preferred room temperature and can curate personalised recommendations based on past stays. AI also helps us analyse guest data to optimise pricing and predict needs.”

“We believe in the enduring power of human connection. Technology is an incredible force, and AI has the potential to be a valuable tool in our industry. However, it’s crucial to remember that luxury hospitality thrives on personal touch and genuine interactions that resonate with our guests. While AI can be an enabler, driving revenue growth, it can never replace the depth of connection forged between a guest and our hotel team.”



Paul Stevens
COO, Premium, Midscale & Economy
Division for ME, Africa & Türkiye, Accor

and support the work of team members. This allows them to focus on complex and high-touch interactions. We strategically deploy AI as a tool to enhance guest experience, and add value for owners, not replace human interaction.”

“AI and technology can enhance the guest experience but will not replace the human touch. We, as human beings, need to interact and feel understood and individually recognised. We need empathy, which is very essential in hospitality, providing warmth and personalised service that technology alone cannot replicate. It is a matter of human nature and culture, especially in the Middle East. AI and technology can facilitate routine tasks.”



Mohamad Saade
General Manager, Radisson Hotel
& Residence Riyadh Olaya, KSA

personal interaction provided by human employees are irreplaceable in delivering exceptional hospitality experiences. We plan to integrate AI for data analysis and predictive maintenance, streamlining routine tasks.”



Petr Dubsky
GM, The Diplomat Radisson Blu Hotel,
Residence and Spa, Bahrain

“In the hospitality sector, AI streamlines back-end development processes, automating repetitive tasks and enhancing code optimisation. Intelligent data management leveraging AI algorithms leads to



Vincent Miccolis
Managing Director, Middle East,
Africa, Turkey & India, The Ascott

“AI and technology streamline back-end work by automating routine tasks, optimising resource management, and analysing data for informed decision-making. This reduces manual effort, enhances



Michael Chan
General Manager
Park Regis Kris Kin Hotel Dubai

“AI and technology can go hand in hand with human interactions in hospitality. Mövenpick as a brand amplifies moments which require a genuine human element and can be complemented

“The ideal approach is to strike a balance between technology and human service, leveraging AI to support and augment human capabilities, ultimately enhancing the overall guest experience. AI and technology streamline backend work through automation, data analysis, and predictive analytics, enhancing operational efficiency in hospitality. They optimise processes, reduce costs, and prioritise personalised guests experiences.”



Fakhri Hindiyeh
General Manager, Radisson Blu
Hotel, Amman Galleria Mall

improved scalability, better performance, and enhanced user experiences. Technology shapes all we do. As it progresses, consumers expect more from their experiences and the role technology plays in those experiences.”

“At The Ascott, we recognise the transformative power of AI in shaping the future of the hospitality industry. AI plays a pivotal role in enhancing the guest experience, streamlining operations, and driving innovation. Through AI-driven data analysis, we can anticipate and fulfil guest requirements more accurately. Last year, The Ascott (Ascott) launched a Generative AI-powered web chatbot to enhance the travel stages of planning and booking.”



Assem Moustafa Amin
Director of Rooms
Shangri-La Dubai

efficiency, and allows staff to focus on delivering superior guest experiences. Technology will enhance luxury by adding personalised experiences and convenience. Traditional services like luggage assistance will still be available.”

“With the rapid progress in the field of AI and technology, it is an ongoing debate about how AI’s dominance is going to evade the personal touch in hospitality and other global sectors. While AI brings with it the potential to digitalize overall experiences, the human touch and personal interaction will always be central and integral to the roots of hospitality. Technologically advanced innovations have undoubtedly ensured a reduction in human errors.”



Alfio Bernardini
GM, Grand Plaza Movenpick Media
City Dubai

by technological advancements. AI and technology may streamline back-end work by analysing data, automating tasks, and fact-checking to name a few, enhancing overall work efficiency.”

Compiled by Dr Shehara Rizly

DET trains workers on safe tourism

Dubai Corporation for Consumer Protection and Fair Trade, a part of Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism, organises a series of workshops as part of the Safe Tourism Awareness Programme.

TT Bureau

During the first half of 2024, Dubai Corporation for Consumer Protection and Fair Trade (DCCPFT), a part of Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), trained 832 employees of 26 prominent hotels and touristic destinations in Dubai under the Safe Tourism Awareness Programme. The DET plans more such workshops in the remaining months.



Ahmad Ali Moussa
Director, Consumer Protection
Department, DCCPFT

The workshops aim to familiarise hospitality staff with DET's services, teach optimal utilisation of these services, and inform them about communication channels dedicated for various tourism services in Dubai. They also educate employees about consumer rights and duties, ensuring guests and visitors understand how to contact the Consumer Protection Department. This includes displaying the consumer protection number in a visible location, as well

as the contact details for submitting complaints. These efforts enhance guest confidence in the transparency of these establishments, further solidifying Dubai's position as the best city to visit, live and work in.

Additionally, the workshops present case studies highlighting services provided by relevant entities, such as Dubai Police smart services, the Lost and Found service, and key hotlines for consumers (999 for emer-

gencies and 901 for non-emergencies and general inquiries).

Ahmad Ali Moussa, Director, Consumer Protection Department, DCCPFT, said: "Recognising Dubai's position as a leading global destination, with its increasing international visitation

We continue to organise awareness workshops for the hospitality sector employees to meet the growing demand

and the efforts to encourage domestic tourism, we continue to organise awareness workshops for the hospitality sector to meet the growing demand."

Medical tourists flock Dubai

With a surge in international level medical facilities, Dubai is attracting a huge number of medical tourists. The emirate's latest goal is to attract 500,000 medical tourists annually by 2025.

TT Bureau

Dubai's rapid expansion in healthcare facilities

The city has witnessed remarkable growth in the healthcare sector, with the number of clinics and hospitals increasing by 25 per cent over the past five years. This expansion is part of Dubai's broader strategy to attract 500,000 medical tourists annually by 2025. Facilities ranging from specialised clinics to large multi-specialty hospitals are setting up in Dubai, drawn by its favourable business environment and high demand for premium medical services.

Influx of international patients and economic impact

Dubai's health tourism sector is booming, with patient numbers growing steadily. In 2023, the city welcomed over 400,000 international patients, contributing significantly to the local economy. The influx of these medical tourists has led to an estimated

AED 1.2 billion in revenue, underscoring the sector's role as a key economic driver.

of the Board at Hair of Istanbul, said that this synergy between local and international medical



Enriching global medical practices in Dubai

The integration of global medical expertise with local practices has enriched Dubai's healthcare landscape. Clinics like Hair of Istanbul, which recently launched their online portal HairOfIstanbul.com, not only bring their specialised services but also introduce innovative medical practices that elevate the overall standard of healthcare in the region. Fatih Akdemir, Chairman

standards fosters a dynamic healthcare environment that benefits both practitioners and patients alike.

Government initiatives and future prospects

The Dubai Health Authority (DHA) has been pivotal in this growth, implementing initiatives that streamline licensing for international practitioners and ensuring that facilities meet stringent quality standards.



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DOT Philippines consults with agents

Department of Tourism, Philippines, welcomed more than 70 crème de la crème of the travel industry in the Middle Eastern region for an interactive session, chaired by **H.E. Christina Garcia Frasco**, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, the Philippines and **H.E. Alfonso Ferdinand A. Ver**, Philippine Ambassador to the UAE, in Dubai. The idea behind the session was to find ways for boosting footfall from the region.



KSA's inbound spending up by 23%

According to the Ministry of Tourism, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the inbound visitor spending has surpassed SAR45 billion during the first quarter of 2024, a 22.9 per cent increase as compared to 2023.

TT Bureau

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has witnessed a 22.9 per cent increase in visitor spending in the first quarter of 2024 compared to 2023, with total expenditures surpassing SAR45 billion (US \$12 billion). Additionally, the "travel" item reports that the

Kingdom earned SAR24 billion, reflecting a growth of over 46 per cent compared to the same period in 2023.

Preliminary data from the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority (SAMA) on the balance of payments' "travel" item indicates that travellers from the Kingdom spent ap-

proximately SAR21 billion during the same timeframe. The increase in inbound visitor spending in the Kingdom marks another milestone in the ongoing success of its tourism sector.

In 2023, KSA topped the UN Tourism list for the highest growth rate in both international tourist numbers and tourism receipts

In 2023, the Kingdom topped the UN Tourism list for the highest growth rate in both international tourist numbers and tourism receipts among the world's leading destinations, compared to 2019.



Tourism makes 24% of Egypt's GDP

The WTTC's 2024 Economic Impact Research revealed that the sector's contribution to Egypt's GDP grew almost 24% last year to reach E£953 billion – nearly 21% ahead of the previous peak.

TT Bureau

According to the World Travel & Tourism Council's (WTTC's) 2024 Economic Impact Research (EIR), last year, international and domestic visitor spending in Egypt recorded considerable increase. Domestic visitor spending in the country grew almost 9 per cent year-on-year to reach more than E£328.5 billion (bn), while spending by international visitors saw a strong 38.5 per cent year-on-year growth, to reach E£470.4 bn during the year.

Jobs supported by the sector grew almost 10 per cent to reach more than 2.5 million (mn), representing one in 12 jobs across Egypt. Although this is strong recovery, it continues to lag previous record job numbers for the sector, set 15 years ago in 2008, when job numbers reached 3.7 mn.

Julia Simpson, President & CEO, WTTC, said; "Egypt's Travel & Tourism sector has made an ex-



The Egyptian Government recognises the value of Travel & Tourism to the Egyptian economy and jobs, placing it at the forefront

traordinary recovery, surging past previous records, highlighting the sector's resilience and its vital role

in Egypt's economy. The Egyptian Government recognises the value of Travel & Tourism to the Egyptian economy and jobs, placing it at the forefront of the agenda, with a real focus on investment."

This year, the sector's GDP contribution is forecast to reach almost E£988 bn, accounting for 8.1 per cent of Egypt's economy. International visitor spending is anticipated to grow 6.2 per cent to reach just under E£500 bn this year, with domestic visitor spending expected to reach over E£340 bn.

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Philippines eyes GCC medical tourists

For the first time, Department of Tourism, Philippines, introduced its health and wellness tourism partners to the GCC market conducting special events in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Riyadh. **Paulo Benito S Tugbang**, Director, Office of Product and Market Development, Department of Tourism Philippines, shared that they want to present the untapped product to the GCC travel trade to attract more visitors.



BWH Hotels signs 17 properties in KSA

Stefan Dubbeling, Managing Director Development EMEA, BWH Hotels, and **Mujahid Pasha**, Director Development – Middle East, BWH Hotels, in an exclusive interview with , discuss their extensive plans for expansion in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The duo outlines the company's strategic vision, unique offerings, and the importance of long-term partnerships in the region.

 TT Bureau

Stefan Dubbeling, Managing Director Development EMEA, BWH Hotels, elaborating on the hotel group's investment in Saudi Arabia, says that they have been active in the Middle East market for many years and **Mujahid Pasha**, Director Development – Middle East, BWH Hotels, based in Dubai, has been looking after the business in the region.

"Our large team is working tirelessly to tap into the vast potential of the Middle Eastern market," says Dubbeling, who

oversees the EMEA region from Amsterdam. "The company's renewed focus on Saudi Arabia has yielded significant results, including the recent signing of nine new properties," he adds.

Achieving new milestones

Elaborating on the group's growth trajectory further, Pasha says, "Currently, we have around 800 keys in operation. With the new signings, we will reach up to 2,500 keys. Some hotels will open by the end of this year, others by the next."

Citing that Saudi Arabia's vision for economic diversifica-



Mujahid Pasha & Stefan Dubbeling

tion through tourism aligns perfectly with BWH Hotels' strategic goals, Pasha adds, "Our target is to have about 50 hotels in the next three years across Saudi Arabia. With the recent signings, we are now at 17 hotels. So, 33 more to go is very achievable."

Strategic focus areas

Dubbeling highlights the strategic focus areas and says, "We are concentrating on Jeddah, Medina, Mecca, and extending to the north and south. While many brands focus on Riyadh, we see immense cultural and natural value in these regions. Saudi

Arabia is a beautiful country with beautiful people."

Soft brand options


Pasha underscores the importance of BWH Hotels' unique soft brand options. "We offer Management, Franchise, and Soft

Partnerships and profit sharing Dubbeling says, "Our company's DNA is unique. We are a membership organisation, run by hoteliers for hoteliers. This non-profit structure means all profits are reinvested into the company. We seek long-term partnerships,

Our target is to have about 50 hotels in the next three years across Saudi Arabia. With the recent signings, we are now at 17 hotels

– Mujahid Pasha

Brand options. Some owners prefer to retain their hotel's identity, and our Soft Brand allows for that, offering back-end support, sales, and marketing without imposing a new brand name. This flexibility is particularly appealing to owners who are emotionally attached to their hotel's individuality," he says.

not quick wins. Our commitment to mutual growth are what set us apart." Pasha adds, "We offer transparency in our charges and include additional services. For instance, each hotel has a dedicated revenue manager and salesperson, ensuring personalised support and understanding of local needs." 

We have been active in the Middle East market for many years. Our large team is working tirelessly to tap into the vast potential of the ME market

– Stefan Dubbeling

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New Palladium hotel to open in RAK

The Palladium Hotel Group has been appointed by Almal Real Estate Development to manage 'The Unexpected Al Marjan Island Hotel & Residences', which is set to open its doors for customers in 2026. The project, coming up in Ras Al Khaimah, is a groundbreaking one and marks a new era of luxury, leisure and vibrant entertainment in the emirate.

TT Bureau

Almal Real Estate Development recently announced the launch of its magnificent hotel and residence project on Al Marjan Island, Ras Al Khaimah. Named "The Unexpected Al Marjan Island Hotel & Residences", this astounding development was unveiled welcoming a prestigious group of investors, partners, and stakeholders.

Led by Almal Real Estate Development, the project will be completed in collaboration with two prestigious brands. The company has recently appointed Palladium Hotel Group, a renowned hotel operator with over five decades of experience and presence in seven countries that manages nine successful brands such as Ushuaia Unexpected Hotels, to launch the project under the brand The Unexpected Hotels & Residences, a



concept inspired of its properties in Ibiza, and the first of its kind in the UAE. The company has also appointed the Design & Architecture Bureau (DAR) as the lead design consultant for the project, set to manage all aspects of the property's lifecycle.

Set to be built on Al Marjan Island, the project will be a unique

addition to this beachfront locale, offering a blend of sophisticated elements and contemporary design, and delivering the same immersive experience that The Unexpected Hotels & Residences brand is lauded for. The property will boast 422 hotel and residential units, all offering unparalleled comfort and privacy with uninterrupted views of the Arabian Gulf.

Situated less than a minute from the Wynn resort, guests will enjoy extraordinary vistas of both the Wynn resort and the serene sea. Guests can also enjoy an infinity rooftop pool, a vibrant beach club, a spa and wellness centre, pocket gardens, five intimate dining areas offering authentic and international cuisine, among other things.

The ground floor amenities at The Unexpected Al Marjan Island Hotel & Residences offer an array of experiences, blending leisure, entertainment, and convenience. Guests can enjoy the Beach Club, pool area, retail outlets, and dining options, all designed to elevate their stay. The first floor caters to VIP guests with exclusive suites and private pools, while the

Dmitriy Starovoitov, Founder of Almal Real Estate Development, shared his remarks on the launch, stating, "The launch of our Al Marjan project marks a new milestone for us, and we are immensely proud to be shaping the luxury hospitality and entertainment scene in the UAE and Ras Al Khaimah. The collaboration with Palladium

The property will boast 422 hotel and residential units, all offering unparalleled comfort and privacy with uninterrupted views of the Gulf

rooftop presents indulgent dining at the Rooftop Restaurant & Bar Terrace, alongside serene tranquility in the VIP Garden Platform and various pool decks and spa facilities for ultimate rejuvenation and entertainment.

Hotel Group through the brand The Unexpected Hotels & Residences reflects our commitment to delivering unparalleled experiences to discerning travellers. We are excited about the possibilities this project brings."

Jordan, Boeing upskill soldiers in tourism

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Jordan, the Hashemite Commission for Disabled Soldiers, Amideast/ Jordan, and Boeing have launched the 'Disabled Soldiers Empowering Tourism' programme. During the next few months 50 participants aged 20-45 will continue to engage in a comprehensive upskilling programme, investing 220 hours in training.

TT Bureau

Training sessions have begun in Amman and Irbid, marking a significant step in preparing wounded, injured, and sick servicemembers and veterans for careers in Jordan's tourism and aviation industries. **His Royal Highness Prince Mired Bin Ra'ad**, Chairman, Board of Directors, Hashemite Commission for Disabled Soldiers, reaffirmed his commitment to empowering wounded and injured soldiers. "Under the directive of His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein, and to act on His Majesty's vision of achieving equality, social justice, and economic empowerment, this programme is launched as a step towards progressing vital development goals. These goals include the rehabilitation, support, and integration of disabled soldiers to enable them to obtain job opportunities and economic prospects in the tourism sector. This aligns with our ongoing efforts at the Hash-



emite Commission for Disabled Soldiers to unify and consolidate efforts to build economic empowerment programs that meet the needs of various sectors and provide inclusive job opportunities," said His Royal Highness Prince Mired Bin Ra'ad.

Over the next months, 50 partici-

pants aged 20-45 will continue to engage in a comprehensive upskilling programme, investing 220 hours in training. The injured servicemembers and veterans will not only enhance their English language proficiency but also cultivate essential soft and technical skills vital for success in tourism and aviation. With tai-

lored training sessions addressing industry-specific demands, courtesy of active participation from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, participants will be well-equipped for transitioning into civilian careers.

The programme with Jordan's Hashemite Commission for Disabled Soldiers builds upon Boeing's ongoing partnership with the Invictus Games Foundation, supporting the recovery and rehabilitation of wounded, injured and sick service personnel and veterans globally.

Kuljit Ghata-Aura, President, Middle East, Türkiye, Africa, and Central Asia, Boeing, said: "We decided to develop this programme jointly with the Hashemite Commission for Disabled Soldiers after we had the honour of meeting with His Royal Highness Prince Mired bin Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein and the Jordanian team at the Invictus Games Düsseldorf 2023. We were inspired

by Team Jordan's resilience and determination at the Games in winning a total of 18 medals and are proud to support their transition into fulfilling careers in aviation and tourism, creating new pathways for their success."

Jim Grabowski, Vice President for Field Operations, Amideast, added: "This programme paves

requirements of the industry, ensuring our participants are poised for impactful contributions and success."

Also, Amideast and Boeing successfully implemented a range of community programmes in Jordan over the years, including careers in aviation programme, now in its second year, supporting

Over the next months, 50 participants aged 20-45 will continue to engage in a comprehensive upskilling programme, investing 220 hours in training

the way for Jordan's disabled soldiers to not only gain the necessary skills for successful integration into the tourism sector, but also to seize opportunities amidst the sector's growth. The expertise cultivated through this programme directly addresses the crucial competency

young Jordanians; data Science and readiness programme, providing data science and analysis training to university graduates, and spark programme, focusing on developing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) skills among girls from public schools.

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Dubai to get new tourism attraction

Dubai offers a new eco-tourism experience to visitors, as the Jebel Ali Beach Development Project, promising exceptional recreational facilities and public amenities, receives approval from the government authorities. The beach is poised to become a distinctive leisure destination that places a high priority on environmental preservation and the protection of local ecosystems and wildlife.

TT Bureau

The new Jebel Ali Beach Development Project in Dubai features exceptional services, facilities, and public amenities. Offering a new eco-tourism experience, visitors to the beach can enjoy watching turtles in

their natural habitat. Various measures and regulations will be put in place to protect them and provide them a safe nesting environment. These efforts align with the efforts of relevant bodies in the United Arab Emirates to rescue, rehabilitate, and return turtles to their natural habitat

and preserve the emirates' rich marine environment.

In line with the directives of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to create the world's best pub-

lic beaches in the emirate, His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and Chairman of The Executive Council of Dubai, approved the Master Plan for the Jebel Ali Beach Development Project.

Dubai currently has a total of eight public beaches: Al Mamzar Beach, Al Mamzar Corniche, Jumeirah 1, Jumeirah 2, Jumeirah 3, Umm Suqeim 1, Umm Suqeim 2, and Jebel Ali Beach. All of them have obtained the globally prestigious Blue Flag accreditation awarded to public beaches that meet its criteria, including compliance with the programme's standards, such

as advanced lockers, wi-fi internet services, electronic screens, beach rescue services using the latest artificial intelligence technologies, and enhanced beach monitoring through more than 100 modern cameras connected to central control rooms in Dubai Municipality and Dubai Police to ensure the highest levels of safety for beachgoers.



The plan aims to carry out 100% development of beaches, raise service levels on public beaches by 400%, and increase the length of beaches by 56%

as marine water quality, environmental education, environmental management, public safety, and services for five consecutive years. The two beaches will be equipped with advanced technol-

The plan aims to carry out 100 per cent development of beaches, raise service levels on public beaches by 400 per cent, and increase the length of beaches by 56 per cent.

LATAM Airlines now on APG Platform

South America's LATAM Airlines announced that it is now available on the APG Platform, APG's NDC portal. This enables full ticketing solutions to thousands of travel agencies in more than 120 countries, including the possibility to add ancillary services, such as bags, during the booking process. The network further allows to offer a more personalised and efficient purchasing experience with better fares.

TT Bureau

LATAM Airlines, recognised as the best airline in South America by Skytrax in 2023 and awarded by APEX with the maximum rating "Five Star Global Airline", operates domestic and international flights to 144 destinations in 23 countries with the aim to connect Latin America to the world. The airline is now available on the APG Platform, APG's NDC portal.



Richard Burgess, President, APG Network and Sandrine de Saint Sauveur, President & CEO, APG Inc, along with Mohamed Jassim Al Rais, Prem Sagar, and members of the APG GULF team at their office in Dubai

Commenting on the development, Richard Burgess, President, APG Association, said, "We are delighted to start this new collaboration with LATAM. It will offer a lot of new oppor-

tunities to our client agents by opening up for them the entire LATAM network. By adding this

airline content, we are making available one of the top ranked airlines in the world. 100 per cent of LATAM's product offering is available through our NDC platform and more functionalities will be coming soon."

Under the agreement, APG Platform and LATAM Airlines provide a full ticketing solution to thousands of travel agencies in more

than 120 countries, including the possibility to add ancillary services, such as bags, during the booking process.

Andreas Schek, Vice President Sales & Branding, LATAM Airlines, said, "We are excited to announce this agreement that deepens our relationship with APG and marks an important milestone in our distribution

strategy. The implementation of NDC by LATAM through the APG network allows us to offer a more personalised and efficient purchasing experience with

ing air and non-air ancillaries combined. Uniquely, the APG Platform is promoted and supported in over 150 countries by the APG Network. The APG Plat-

We are excited to announce this agreement that deepens our relationship with APG and marks an important milestone

– Andreas Schek

better fares, improving transparency and expanding our service capabilities. With APG as a partner, we are confident that we will be able to expand our global reach and provide significant added value to our passengers."

With 31 carriers available, offering the best fares, APG Platform is a ticketing platform which can assist travel agents to generate additional revenue by enlarging their catalogue and by sell-

form is under the newest XML technology and follows all IATA standards. With APG Platform, NON-IATA and IATA agencies can find the best offers in full transparency on all the routes operated by an airline. They can also combine the airline ticket with non-air products, such as hotels, car rentals, and ancillary services (baggage, special meals, sport equipment, general assistance, wi-fi access, and lounge access).

It (collaboration with LATAM) will offer a lot of new opportunities to our client agents by opening up for them the entire LATAM network

– Richard Burgess

Staycations fuel hotel business in UAE

► Contd. from page 1



Ashraf Helmi
GM and Area Business Development
Manager, Naāma Beach Villas & Spa

“We are experiencing high demand for staycations at Naāma Beach Villas & Spa, particularly from Dubai. We believe our villa setting provides the ideal sanctuary for people to get away from the hustle of the city. Most of our guests are coming directly through our website and calling to the resort. Our butler service ensures that every request is met for our guests.”



Adrian Nastase
Director of Sales and Marketing
SLS Dubai

“In the UAE, guests prefer beach stays, but during summer, downtown locations are favoured for their proximity to main attractions. Guests especially appreciate when all offerings are under one roof, as we have at SLS, where you enjoy a spa on the 69th floor, a Michelin Guide-selected restaurant, a steakhouse by a famous butcher, and the highest overflow pool.”



Shady Dawad
General Manager
Millennium Place Miraf

“Staycations remain major source of business for UAE hotels during summer months, especially among residents looking for a quick getaway. They favour staying at city hotels with comprehensive amenities, downtown or beach resorts offering a relaxing experience. Most guests book their staycations directly through hotel websites or apps for exclusive offers.”



Mohammed Iqbal
General Manager, Khalidia Place
Hotel Dubai by Mourouj Gloria

“One of the main factors contributing to the popularity of staycations is the convenience they offer. With busy work schedules and limited vacation time, many people find it easier to plan a short getaway within the country rather than travelling overseas, as staycations provide a safe and comfortable alternative for those looking to relax and unwind.”



Tareq Bin Hussain
Director of Sales
Shangri-la Dubai

“Staycations remain popular in the UAE. Guests prefer to stay in luxury hotels and resorts, especially those with exceptional facilities and unique experiences in prime locations like Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Bookings for staycations are made directly or through agents. Guests expect premium service, diverse dining options, & leisure activities.”



Sapna Aidasani
Director Marketing
Pluto Travel

“Staycations are ever popular, and most preferred destinations are Ras al Khaimah, Fujairah and Abu Dhabi. Many hotels are approaching us and offering value deals like all-inclusive or half-board deals, or stay with theme parks visits and this is much cheaper than booking directly. So, we get many inquiries and booking for staycay.”

Compiled by Dr Shehara Rizly

RWC sets sail in Gulf this October

Travel enthusiasts can embark on a cruise from Dubai on the Resorts World One to explore the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. Starting from 18 October 2024 to 13 April 2025, cruise holiday makers can experience comfort and convenience of a premium, boutique cruise vacation while visiting multiple destinations. It promises the best of adventure and entertainment at sea.

TT Bureau

Cruise-seeking travellers in the region will have a brand new experience at sea with Resorts World Cruises, as it expands its global footprint to the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman with the premium boutique lifestyle cruise ship, Resorts World One. Starting from 18 October 2024 until 13 April 2025, the Resorts World One will homeport and depart from Dubai, providing travellers from the region the option to embark from the emirate on a roundtrip cruise adventure to popular destinations within the Gulf waters. Discover the convenience and comfort of cruising to multiple destinations, without the hassle of packing and unpacking or searching for accommodations at each destination.

Resorts World One combines premium amenities with diverse culinary options, offering the best of lifestyle and entertain-



ment at sea, halal-certified cuisine options and a luxurious experience at The Palace, a 'luxury ship-within-a ship' private all-suite enclave with exclusive restaurant, sundeck, gym and other facilities, including its own 24-hour European style butler service.

Resorts World One will offer roundtrip cruise itineraries from Dubai, including the 2-Night Sir Bani Yas Weekend Cruise with

departures on Fridays; a 3-Night Oman Cruise to Khasab and Muscat departing on Sundays; and a 2-Night Doha Cruise departing on Wednesdays. Guests will have the flexible option to combine two or all three of the itineraries to increase the cruise length to a four, five or a seven-night cruise.

Shore excursions and onboard activities will allow passengers to immerse themselves in the

rich cultural tapestry of Dubai and the surrounding region, especially Muscat, Khasab and Sir Bani Yas Island. Visits to iconic landmarks, heritage sites, and shopping destinations will be part of the itinerary for tourists while Bollywood DJ parties and music bands, pyjama & foam parties, movies, will be among other attractions onboard. “As Resorts World Cruises embarks on this special journey, we envision a fusion of cultures, where

discerning luxury travellers from the Middle East connect with the vibrant charm of some of the most prominent landmarks within the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. The deployment of the Resorts World One cruise ship symbolises not only a bridge between nations but also bound-

fly-cruise exploration,” said Michael Goh, President, Resorts World Cruises.

Resorts World Cruises operates cruises with homeports in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Indonesia. With the upcoming homeport deploy-

Resorts World One will offer roundtrip cruise itineraries from Dubai, including 2-Night Sir Bani Yas Weekend Cruise & 3-Night Oman Cruise to Khasab & Muscat

less opportunities for travellers to explore, discover, and create unforgettable memories in the region. With seamless access and regular flight connectivity to a global hub like Dubai, travellers in the region now have an unparalleled option to explore multiple destinations through a luxurious cruise vacation, ushering in a new and exciting era of

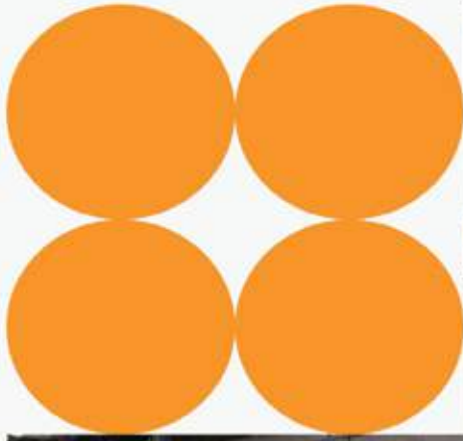
ment in Dubai, Resorts World One is expected to make 75 calls in the region with 150,000 passengers over the six-month period, contributing to the growth of cruise tourism in the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. It will attract a new segment of fly cruise passengers from the GCC region, increasing diversity to the Arabian Gulf cruise market. ▶

SriLankan showcases boutique hotels

SriLankan Airlines, along with the Consulate of Dubai in the UAE, organised a special event to showcase 10 boutique properties across the island of Sri Lanka to the UAE's travel fraternity. Speaking at the event, **Alexi Gunasekara**, Consul General of Sri Lanka, said the island nation aims to attract more visitors, especially from the Middle East region with UAE as a key partner.



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TOURISM MALAYSIA

Dubai

MOHD FAHARUDDIN HATMIN has been appointed as the new Director of the Tourism Malaysia Dubai office. A visionary leader in tourism, Hatmin brings 22 years of experience across various divisions within Tourism Malaysia, including Tourism Malaysia in Milan, Italy. Now, in Dubai, Hatmin aims to elevate Malaysia's tourism footprint in the Middle East, emphasising on sustainable practices and collaboration. His vision promises an exciting chapter for Malaysia's tourism industry. Taking over the reins in the Middle East, Hatmin is tasked with overlooking not just the United Arab Emirates but also Pakistan. Currently, he will be focusing on the winter season working with airlines and travel agents so that they could have a joint promotion.



AZHAR MUSYABRI Abdul Mutalib has been appointed as the new Deputy Director of Tourism Malaysia Dubai. Having worked for 17 years with Tourism Malaysia office across various divisions, he will apply his skills and experience outside of Malaysia. At a time when Malaysia is growing its tourism products to entice more visitors from across the globe with a special focus on the Middle East and Dubai in particular, Azhar will be sharing his expertise with the UAE market. Azhar is currently in Dubai gaining valuable experience working outside Malaysia, which presents a great opportunity to expand his knowledge and focus on marketing efforts to promote Malaysia.



GEWAN HOTELS & RESORTS

Abu Dhabi

Gewan Hotels & Resorts has appointed **KHALED AL KURDI** as the new Director of Operations for HE Hotel Apartments by Gewan in Dubai. With over 13 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Al Kurdi brings extensive knowledge and a commitment to excellence that will enhance the guest experience at Gewan's latest luxury property. Khaled began his career with Wyndham Hospitality in Jordan and has held significant roles in luxury hotels in Jordan and Bulgaria. Known for his ability to build strong relationships with his team and foster a positive work environment, Al Kurdi has implemented comprehensive training programmes. In his new role, Al Kurdi will oversee the daily operations of HE Hotel Apartments by Gewan, ensuring the highest standards of service.



RADISSON DUBAI DAMAC HILLS

Dubai

MOHAMED FARWATH has been appointed as IT Manager at Radisson DAMAC Hills. Farwath's journey in the hospitality industry spans over eight years, marked by his unwavering dedication and progressive career in IT. With a robust academic foundation in Computer System Design, he has consistently demonstrated his prowess in technology and its application within the hospitality sector. His career began with a focus on IT infrastructure, where he honed his skills and steadily advanced through various roles, ultimately leading him to his current position as the IT Manager. Having worked in renowned hospitality companies, such as Hilton and Hyatt, Farwath brings a wealth of expertise to the Radisson Hotel Dubai DAMAC Hills team. His deep understanding of technology.



THE TRAVEL PORTFOLIO

Abu Dhabi

NAMRATHA ROSE has been appointed as the Business Development Manager at The Travel Portfolio. Her wealth of expertise and experience over the years in travel and tourism sectors makes her an invaluable asset to the new venture. She was regarded as the game changer for the Spain Tourism Board in GCC serving as Manager - Marketing and Trade Relations where she successfully completed her tenure. This role marks an exciting new chapter in her career, as she collaborates with the expanding team to drive the Middle East expansion of Heavens Portfolio, known for representing the world's most luxurious travel brands and experiences. It offers a curated collection of unique, exclusive, and truly unforgettable travel providers, including luxury hotels, wellness resorts, boutique retreats, DMCs, and tourism boards.



HSMAI ME

Dubai

JUDITH CARTWRIGHT has been appointed Chair of HSMAI Middle East's Revenue Optimisation Advisory Board. Judith has more than 20-year experience in the hospitality industry, achieving unprecedented results by taking an innovative and disruptive approach to traditional revenue management. She is also a member of the International Society of Hospitality Consultants (ISHC), a leading source for global hospitality expertise. She is also Founder and Managing Director of UAE-based Black Coral Consulting, a leading revenue optimisation consultancy for the hospitality sector. The firm has cemented its reputation as a trusted partner for luxury hotels and hospitality businesses, servicing clients across the Americas, Europe, Africa, Middle East and Indian Ocean.



SUN SIYAM RESORTS

Maldives

Sun Siyam Resorts promotes **SARA SIYAM** from the position of Creative Director to Director of Marketing. With an impressive tenure at Sun Siyam Resorts since 2017, Sara Siyam has demonstrated exceptional leadership and creativity, driving brand development and innovative creative strategies. In her new role, she will lead the marketing department in refining the creative vision of Sun Siyam Resorts. She will be responsible for elevating brand awareness through integrated brand and marketing campaigns, as well as unique experiential events across all properties to ultimately drive growth and revenue for the company. Her focus will further enhance Sun Siyam Resorts' global brand presence.



THE ST. REGIS ABU DHABI

Abu Dhabi

The St. Regis Abu Dhabi appoints **EVELYN NGUYEN VAN SCHWARCZ** as its new Director of Groups & Events. With 11-year experience in hotel and events operations, Schwarcz has consistently demonstrated her expertise in business development, corporate engagement, and event management. Prior to this, she was Head of Event Sales & Marketing at Pixoul Gaming & Adrenark Adventure. In previous roles, Schwarcz was instrumental in both the active and passive acquisition of new clients. She expertly managed all event communications from site visits, to set up and execution, and maintained long-term relationships with clients and third parties. Her notable achievements include closing corporate event deals with prestigious clients.



UNITED HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

Dubai

United Hospitality Management (UHM) has appointed **ANTHONY E WRIGHT** as the new Vice President of Operations. Wright joins UHM with an extensive background in the hospitality industry, bringing over 20 years of experience in hotel management and operations. In his new role, Wright will lead the UHM Middle East team reporting to CEO Greg O'Stean, focusing on the seamless transition of new acquisitions and ensuring the profitable operations of all UHM hotels and holiday homes in the Middle East. Wright's impressive career includes leadership roles with prestigious hospitality brands, such as Intercontinental Hotel Group, Hilton, Millennium Hotels and Centara Hotels. His track record of opening and managing successful hotels, coupled with his strategic vision and people management skills, positions him as a key asset to UHM.



TAJ

Dubai

NAVROSE ARORA has been promoted as the Hotel Manager at Taj Dubai. With more than 15 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Arora brings a profound understanding of guest service and operational excellence to this role. He began his journey with the Taj group in 2020, where he honed his skills in various capacities across multiple properties. His journey has been marked by a steadfast commitment to providing exceptional guest experiences and a deep-seated passion for hospitality. Over the years, he has successfully managed diverse teams, and spearheaded numerous initiatives. In his new role, he will oversee all aspects of hotel operations, ensuring seamless coordination between departments.



THE RITZ-CARLTON RAS AL KHAIMAH,

AL WADI DESERT

Ras Al Khaimah

The Ritz-Carlton Ras Al Khaimah, Al Wadi Desert welcomes **AIDAN DEMPSEY** as the new General Manager. With over 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry, including notable roles at prestigious properties across Europe, the US, and the Middle East, Dempsey brings a wealth of expertise in luxury and boutique hotel brands to this new role. In his previous role as General Manager at Hotel Bristol, a Luxury Collection Hotel in Warsaw, Poland, Dempsey demonstrated exceptional leadership by implementing successful strategies centred on quality assurance, guest satisfaction, and innovative upsell programmes. His career is marked by his adept management across various operational departments.



GAGAN SINGH has been promoted as the Food & Beverage Director at Taj Dubai, where he oversees the culinary and beverage operations of the luxurious five-star property. With a career spanning nearly two decades in the hospitality industry, he brings a wealth of experience and a passion for excellence to his role. At Taj Dubai, Gagan is responsible for curating exceptional dining experiences across the hotel's multiple restaurants and bars. His leadership ensures that each venue offers a unique culinary journey, blending traditional flavours with modern techniques. Under his guidance, the F&B team at Taj Dubai has continued to set new standards in luxury dining, earning rave reviews from guests and critics alike. His commitment to sustainability and local sourcing is also noteworthy.



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